

Setonaikai National Park

The largest national park in Japan, Setonaikai National Park extends across almost 67,000 hectares in the Seto Inland Sea region. Its diverse scenery includes highlights such as the 3,000-island Inland Sea archipelago, the Rokko mountain range, the tidal whirlpools of the Naruto Strait, and off the coast of Hiroshima the sacred island of Miyajima, site of Itsukushima Shrine, a UNESCO World Heritage site. Setonaikai is also Japan's oldest national park: it was designated in 1934, three years after the country passed its first National Parks Law.

The Inland Sea archipelago is recognized as a world-class place of natural beauty, and has long been known as a stage of history and legends. In 1185, the Battle of Yashima, a decisive engagement in the conflict that led to the 700-year period of warrior rule over Japan, was fought here between the rival Taira and Minamoto samurai clans. This heritage influenced the decision to make the region Japan's first national park, as did the words of foreign travelers who visited the Inland Sea during the 1800s. Europeans including German botanist Philipp Franz von Siebold (1796–1866) and his compatriot, geographer Ferdinand von Richthofen (1833–1905), praised the scenery of the archipelago, which was said to appear particularly beautiful when viewed from Yashima.